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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT
MOZAMBIQUE'S FUTURE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd C.Chapman, Reasons 1.4(b+d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 15 key members of Mozambican civil society joined visiting AF/S Deputy Director Susie Pratt for a dinner hosted by the Charge to discuss the country's elections and shrinking political space. While acknowledging that much has been accomplished since the 1994 presidential elections following the civil war, the civic leaders expressed marked pessimism as to Mozambique's future. The current ruling party, FRELIMO, has consolidated its authority over all branches of the government and much of the private sector, and is anticipated to triumph easily in the presidential, parliamentary and provincial elections set for October 28. The results of the elections are expected to provoke resignation, not outrage or significant violence, among the populace. Several of the participants urged the USG not to issue sharply critical statements unless they were backed up by action, such as a reduction in aid; rather, they suggested that the USG consider complimenting the public for voting, finding ways to shore up an increasingly enfeebled and impotent civil society, and carefully documenting the flaws in the electoral process. END SUMMARY.

A LONG, BAD WAVE COMING

12. (C/NF) Joining Pratt, the Charge, the A/DCM, Poloff and USAID Democracy team leader were: Miguel de Brito, Institute of Social and Economic Studies (IESE); Sheik Abdul Carimo Sau, Islamic Council of Mozambique and the Electoral Observatory (OE); the Reverend Dinis Matsolo, Executive Director of the Council of Christian Churches and also with the OE; and Manuel de Araujo, a former RENAMO MP and founder of the Center for Mozambican and International Studies (CEMO). In response to Pratt's question about the current Mozambican political scene, de Brito characterized progress since the original 1994 elections but compared the current environment to a "bad wave," and speculated that matters would likely continue to deteriorate for at least another five years. De Brito observed that former president and Mo Ibrahim prize winner Joaquim Chissano had permitted a then-nascent civil society to gain a toe-hold, however modest, which Frelimo hardliners believe contributed to his near-loss in the 1999 presidential election. Current President Armando Guebuza has made all efforts necessary to ensure the same would not happen to him.

A BRIEF WINDOW FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION

13. (C) De Araujo joined Sheik Carimo in suggesting that FRELIMO control was more extensive than generally

recognized and that the "bad wave" would last longer than five years. "Things will get worse. We are only seeing the beginning," de Araujo said. Sheik Carimo, who travels extensively and often in Mozambique, related several anecdotes detailing illegal FRELIMO tactics to discourage opposition voters or destroy competing parties' campaign materials. De Araujo noted that much of the international community's influence derives from its donor contributions, in excess of 50% of Mozambique's budget. He stated that, assuming current estimates of greatly increased natural resource revenues -- primarily from coal, natural gas and hydroelectric power -- are correct, such leverage will wane. The years preceding the 2014 elections may be the international community's last opportunity to effect change, encourage transparency and stimulate democratic governance.

FRELIMO TOWERS OVER A FEARFUL CIVIL SOCIETY

14. (C) De Brito and de Araujo described FRELIMO's dominance of the political and economic space as the result of careful, long-term planning: FRELIMO is always two steps ahead of the opposition, electoral observers, and even the donor community. Sheik Carimo added that, despite RENAMO's former strength in rural regions, FRELIMO had made significant in-roads. Over the past five years, it has put into effect a strategy of re-launching itself as an even stronger party, one less vulnerable to outside influence, whether from opposition parties or donor nations.

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15. (C) The Charge recalled one student's reaction to a speech he had given on cooperation, transparency, and the problem of corruption in the central province of Manica: "It is easy for you, with your diplomatic immunity, to urge us to speak out. But we are afraid. If I were to denounce corruption or challenge authority, my father would lose his government job and my sister and I our places at the university." The audience had cheered and clapped in response. The dinner guests acknowledged that fear was a constant for civil society, with different groups demonstrating different levels of tolerance for officially-inspired pressure on their organizations.

WHAT SHOULD THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DO?

16. (C) The Charge asked for the group's suggestions as to what the diplomatic community should do during the coming weeks. Their responses varied. Reverend Matsolo accepted an overwhelming FRELIMO mandate as a fait accompli and cautioned against comments which might needlessly provoke public acts of violence. Acknowledging FRELIMO's deft manipulation of the elections he said: "The soil has been prepared." De Brito concurred: "First, do no harm. The people need a period of calm to reflect on next steps." De Brito also expressed concern that hasty foreign criticism might play into FRELIMO's hands, allowing it to arouse nationalist passions by "playing the xenophobia card." Araujo, however, urged international missions to take action, pointing out the importance of seeing a passing observer vehicle and reminding the group of international observers' positive contribution to calm in this past year's municipal elections. He also urged greater support for the press and other sectors of civil society.

17. (C) De Brito recognized the difficulty inherent in securing consensus among the several observer groups -- EU, AU, UNDP, SADC, etc. -- but counseled that the more consistency in reporting, the better. While the Mozambican people might be more receptive to an AU or SADC opinion, FRELIMO was likely to take note of all reporting and

commentary, he said. De Brito suggested a middle ground between Araujo's call to action and Reverend Matsolo's more cautious approach: "Western commentators should laud the Mozambican people for casting their votes, but detail as completely as possible the flaws throughout the electoral process, not just focusing on election day. FRELIMO has planned well: installing pliant members at the National Election Council (CNE), suppressing the nomination of independent judges to the Constitutional Council, manipulating voter registration rolls, disqualifying selected parties from legislative elections, and excluding most candidates from the presidential elections."

COMMENT: DISCOURAGED, BUT RESIGNED TO THE LONG HAUL

18. (C) The Mozambican experts gathered at the Charge's residence have decades of political experience. They were unanimous in their pessimistic assessment of the country's political future. Nonetheless, they remained resolute. While recognizing FRELIMO's stranglehold on an ever-weakening civil society, they were looking ahead to the 2014 elections, and considering how best to wrest back control of their country at the polls. Their unanimous opinion was that the international community needed to begin immediately fortifying civil society and the electoral institutions to prepare for an improved election in 2014. More than one expressed regret at the decline in civil society support from the USG and other donors in recent years. Most discouraging perhaps was the sense of inevitability that FRELIMO would continue to control all instruments of power in Mozambique for the foreseeable future and that the opportunities for genuine democratic change in Mozambique still remained a long way off.

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